COMMONWEALTH CORPORATION

WCTF SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING TOOLKIT

Tool 1: Sustainability Framework

The Six Pillars of Sustainability in Workforce Partnerships

Read time: 15–20 minutes | Next step: Tool 2, Readiness Reflection

Why Sustainability Planning Matters

Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund (WCTF) grants support partnerships that address critical workforce needs in Massachusetts. These investments help partners develop training programs, build new collaborations, and test innovative workforce strategies.

WCTF grants are designed to launch new approaches, not to serve as the long-term funding source for ongoing programs. Sustainability planning helps your partnership decide how the workforce strategy you have built can continue, evolve, or transition once grant funding ends.

What Sustainability Can Look Like

Sustainability does not have to mean keeping your program exactly as it exists today. For many partnerships, it involves:

- embedding training within an existing institution
- shifting leadership to a different partner organization
- securing employer investment
- adapting the program model to operate at a different scale

The goal is to make sure the workforce strategy developed through WCTF continues to strengthen your regional workforce system, even if the grant-funded structure around it changes.

The Six Pillars of Sustainability

The toolkit organizes sustainability planning around six pillars. They are interconnected: a partnership may be stronger in some areas than others, but long-term sustainability depends on how the pillars work together. Every tool that follows is organized around these same six pillars.



Pillar 1: Workforce Demand and Program Value

Sustainable workforce initiatives address a clear and ongoing workforce need. Programs that respond to persistent hiring demand and demonstrate measurable outcomes are more likely to attract long-term support from partners, institutions, and employers.

Consider whether your initiative continues to deliver value to the regional workforce system, not only as a program but as part of a broader workforce strategy.

Questions to consider

- Does the workforce need that motivated the initiative still exist?
- Are employers continuing to hire for these roles?
- What outcomes demonstrate the value of the program?
- What workforce gaps would re-emerge if the program ended?

Key idea: When a partnership can clearly describe the workforce need and demonstrate impact, it is better positioned to sustain the work.

Pillar 2: Partnership Strength and Commitment

Workforce initiatives rarely succeed through the efforts of a single organization. Sustainable strategies are supported by partnerships in which multiple organizations share responsibility, align around a common goal, and see clear value in continuing the work.

Strong partnerships often include workforce boards, training providers, employers, community-based organizations, and other regional stakeholders.

Questions to consider

- Which partners play essential roles in the initiative?
- Which roles currently depend on grant funding?
- Which partners are willing and able to continue their involvement?
- Who will coordinate or lead the work moving forward?
- How might responsibilities and decision-making shift after the grant ends?

Key idea: Sustainability is more likely when partnerships move from grant-based collaboration to shared ownership and clear governance of the strategy.

Pillar 3: Employer Engagement and Investment

Employer engagement is a critical factor in sustaining workforce initiatives. When employers see clear value in a training program or workforce strategy, they are more likely to stay engaged and contribute resources.

Employer investment can take many forms, including:

- providing input on program design and curriculum
- offering work-based learning or clinical opportunities
- contributing equipment or instructional support
- hiring program graduates
- providing financial or in-kind support

Look not only at whether employers are engaged, but at how deeply.

Questions to consider

- Are employers actively shaping the program?
- Do they view this as a workforce pipeline they rely on?
- Are there opportunities to elevate employer champions within the partnership?

Key idea: Sustainability is strengthened when employers move from participants to co-investors in the strategy.

Pillar 4: Program Model Adaptability

Program models that rely heavily on grant funding may struggle to continue in their current form once the grant ends. Sustainable initiatives are often those that can adapt to changing resources, partner roles, or regional needs.

Adaptability may involve:

- operating the program at a smaller or different scale
- integrating training into an existing institution or system
- modifying program design while maintaining core outcomes
- shifting responsibilities across partners

Questions to consider

- How flexible is your current model?
- Which elements of the program could be embedded within existing systems or organizations?
- Which components are essential to preserve, and which could change?

Key idea: Sustainability often depends less on preserving a program in its current form and more on integrating its most effective components into long-term structures.

Pillar 5: Resource and Funding Strategy

Funding is not the starting point of sustainability, but long-term continuation does require identifying resources beyond the original grant. Sustainable initiatives often rely on a combination of funding sources and partner contributions.

Possible strategies include:

- employer investment or consortium models
- braided public funding
- integration into existing institutional budgets
- apprenticeship or incumbent worker funding
- additional grant funding
- in-kind contributions from partners

Questions to consider

- Which costs are currently covered by the grant, including staff positions such as program directors and coordinators?
- Which participant supports, such as transportation, childcare, or stipends, are grant-funded, and what would happen to participants if they ended?
- How could costs be distributed or shared across partners?
- What mix of sources would make the strategy less dependent on any single funding stream?

Key idea: Plan not only how to replace WCTF funding, but how to distribute costs, align resources across partners, and build a more durable funding model.

Pillar 6: Data, Measurement, and Storytelling

Sustainability is not only about whether an initiative continues, but how well it continues to meet workforce needs over time. Clear metrics help partnerships understand progress, make informed decisions, and demonstrate value to employers, funders, and other stakeholders.

Good sustainability measures are practical, shared across partners, and aligned with the core goals of the workforce strategy. You do not need to track everything. Choose three to five indicators that reflect your priorities and can be monitored over time. The table below offers examples across five areas.

Area	Example indicators
Workforce and participant outcomes	Training enrollment and completion; employment placement in targeted roles; wage gains and career progression
Employer engagement and satisfaction	Employer participation in program design or activities; number of employers actively hiring from the program; employer satisfaction with outcomes
Partnership strength and function	Consistency of partner participation; clarity of roles and responsibilities; effectiveness of coordination and communication
Program continuity and adaptation	Continuation of key program components; integration into partner organizations or systems; adjustments made to improve effectiveness
Resource and funding stability	Diversity of funding sources; employer or partner contributions; ability to operate without relying on a single funding stream

Clear, shared metrics support stronger decisions, strengthen partner alignment, support fundraising, and keep sustainability efforts focused on meaningful outcomes rather than simply maintaining activities.

Key idea: Numbers show that a strategy works; stories show why it matters. The strongest case for sustainability uses both.

> **Pro Tip**
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> **Why this matters:** Funders, employers, and partners respond to stories supported by evidence.
>
> **Try this:** Pair one quantitative outcome with one participant, employer, or partner success story.
>
> **Example:** *"Seventy-eight percent of participants were employed within six months, and one local employer expanded hiring because graduates consistently met its workforce needs."*

Supporting resources for Pillar 6

These optional tools can help your partnership strengthen its approach to data, measurement, and storytelling:

- **Metrics Selection Worksheet.** Choose three to five indicators that reflect workforce impact, employer engagement, partnership health, and sustainability.
- **Dashboard Planner.** Decide where each metric's data will come from, who will maintain it, and how often it will be reported.
- **Story Builder.** Combine outcome data with participant, employer, and partner experiences into a narrative you can share with stakeholders.

Next Step

Now that your partnership shares a common understanding of the six pillars, move to **Tool 2: Readiness Reflection**. It asks you to rate your partnership on each pillar and uses those ratings to surface strengths, gaps, and the conversations you most need to have.